New Fiction

Continued from preceding page.

come a prima donna and a dozen minor instances of such much used material. But Mr. Brighouse always manages to give them a fresh, newly alive incarnation.

The real hero of the piece, however, is not the Hepplestall family so much as the modern manufacturing industry—steam, from its birth, the triumph of machinery, and the development to its present colossal stature of the Manchester cotton business. It is an epic affair, unpromising, perhaps, at first sight, but really tremendous, as it covers the changing life not only of a few families but of a whole society. It touches in its long course nearly every level of the people—a most difficult thing to handle without being either vague and too diffused, or inadequate because of too much omission.

The founder of the business, Reuben Hepplesstall, was a member of the gentry, of a county family; ambitious, and bent upon marrying the county beauty, Dorothy Verners, not, at first, because he loved her, but in order to triumph over others who held him in small esteem. He is also determined to make his mark, somehow, and impose himself as a master in the county. He is intelligent enough to foresee something of the coming industrial revolution, and some of the possibilities of steam, which was then regarded as a toy, or an absurdity, or, sometimes, an invention of the devil. He boldly breaks away from his order, sells his land and builds the first steam factory in his district. Social ostracism follows. He becomes entangled with pretty Phoebe, the daughter of a small, old fashioned hand mill owner, and she bears him a son. But now his fortunes turn and circumstances favor his courtship of the haughty Dorothy, with whom he also falls deeply in love. He marries her and the stage is set for the first acts of the drama.

Naturally the coming of steam destroys the old life. The weavers and spinners are forced into the mills, and we are given a striking picture of the evils, hardships and horrors of the first stages of that crude industrialism. Phoebe, abandoned, and her father ruined, is forced into Reuben's mill. So is his illegitimate son, John, at the age of five. All this part of the story is handled simply, with full restraint and absence of hysterics, but it makes a terrible showing. That, of course, has been done before by many competent writers, but this version ranks high among the accounts of that period. Labor troubles follow, and when John has reached manhood his young wife is killed, a victim of the factory system, and John, seeking vengeance, tries to kill Reuben, not knowing that he is himself Rueben's son, but his bullet instead kills Dorothy. John is hanged, in spite of Phoebe's plea, and thus the foundation is laid for succeeding acts of the play; in the hatred of the Bradshaws, descendants of John, for all the Hepplestalls, a hatred that is to last for generations, taking into itself the natural hostility between the exploited workman and the employer.

This part also is admirably managed, never overplayed or allowed to degenerate into mere melodrama. Indeed, some of it rises, especially in its dramatic irony, almost to the level of the Greek tragedy. The murder of Dorothy serves to drive her oldest son, Edward, into the factory, from which he had hoped to escape. He had quarreled with his father, Reuben, about it, and Dorothy had tried to reconcile them, though she agreed with the son in his desire to quit the business which she regarded as beneath their family level. But Edward is now moved by desire for revenge. "Drive or be driven, sir, you said," he tells his father. "And by God I'll drive! I'll drive! That blackguard came from there!" And poor Dorothy had died happy in the belief that she had succeeded in rescuing her son from the factory! It is a fit introduction to the next industrial stage.

The narrative, however, now jumps forward to the present age, the necessary connective tissue being adequately supplied in various retrospects. In the meantime the house of Heppelstall's has grown to gigantic proportions, employing thousands, with its branches all over the world. It has also become a sample of the best conceived, most up to date factory, and its head, Sir Philip, regards it as a sacred trust, an ideal that has grown up through several generations. "We are trustees for our work people," he tells his son, Rupert; "we do not coddle them, but we find them work. . . . Trade fluctuates and my problem is, as far as is humanly possible, to safeguard our people against unemployment." But here again Mr. Brighouse does not degenerate into sentimentalism. He gives a realistic picture of modern industrial conditions.

The final scenes of the book cover the war, the rise of Mary, who was a Bradshaw, to operatic success, and her marriage to Sir Rupert, with his eventual devotion to the service, to the ideal of carrying on Hepplestall's as, indeed, a trust for all concerned. The climax, in spite of its conventional elements, is very cleverly engineered, and has excellent effect as a "curtain." It is not a book to devour, heedlessly, at a sitting, but it will easily hold any one's close attention, simply as a tale, and it will repay close reading as a study of society in its development to its present stage of growth.

THE ISLE OF THE SEVEN MOONS. By Robert Gordon Anderson. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

IN order to enjoy "The Isle of Seven Moons" one must approach it in an uncritical spirit. It seems to have been written as something of a lark and an experiment; why not let it go at that? Perhaps if it had been worked over and pruned into better form it would have lost some of its Never-Never land charm. So let us take it for what it is, a tale of adventure, piracy, treasure and a vanishing, uncharted island, such as Peter Pan might have written if he had consented to grow up enough to become a writing man—and some of the best writing men, you know, are those who have the most of Peter still remaining in their makeup.

. . . "and tangled forests full of birds that squawk horribly yet have the most scrumptious feathers . . . and the ocean is deep and clear as a spring, and in it are fish so queer they look like little jokes of God. . . ."

This is the introduction of the vanishing island, and in this light and poetic tone the narrative is keyed. The horrors—and there are a number of them—for example, the black cat on the chest of the mysteriously dead sailor, chills one's blood only pleasantly ("Missus, I wants to make your blood creep," as Dickens's Fat Boy says), and there is an elfin quality in the descriptive bits when we really get to the island which disarms any impatience one may feel with dialogue which would doubtless be the better for severe pruning. As it is, this dialogue and many small incidents seriously hamper the narrative at times, for it is a plot which calls for swift telling, and the art of combining such swift telling with accurate portraiture and much dialogue is not to be attained in any haphazard manner.

Stevenson wrote the latter part of "Treasure Island" "like so much small talk," but think of the gymnasium training his pen had been through to make him able to do it!

There is much coincidence in the story, and coincidence always makes a reader a bit uncomfortable, it's hard to say exactly why, for such things do happen. But the bottle with the castaway's message in it goes rather too straight to its destination, and then the coming together of so many different explorers of the island with so many different charts at the same time—on an island, too, which by its own showing is always moving around, mountain and all—well, just remember that it is Peter Pan who writes, and take the story for what it is and not for what you think it ought to be.

CALVARY. By Octave Mirbeau. New York: Lieber & Lewis.

IT is unfortunate that a foreign author who is a stylist in his own tongue, as M. Mirbeau is, should be presented to English readers in so poor a translation as this. In the middle of a tense bit of emotional description one bumps into such a phrase as, "She battled hard against these thoughts which came in hives," and the effect is disastrously comic. Or we read of soldiers that "with bodies rigid by immobility . . . we pushed and jostled one another." It is unpleasant to find fault with a translator, but in such a case as this it is a duty both to the reader and to the unfortunate author.

M. Mirbeau has a definite niche of his own as a minor member of the Goncourt Academy circle. He is highly efficient in his way, and if that way seems a little less important than its devotees believe it nevertheless has a certain value. It is a minor voice, but genuine enough. But it is not at all the voice of that France whose most outstanding quality is its clear, clean cut sanity. It is rather an echo of the decadence of a few years ago, of what was once familiar as *fin de siecle* literature. There is an ineffectual whine through it all—sincere, even tragic—but still a whine.

The story deals with the adventures, psychic and sensual, of a misbegotten unfortunate of tainted ancestry. He is real enough, a thing to pity, but one wonders whether it is worth while to make so much fuss over congenital incompetence. It is right and useful, both artistically and morally, to dilate upon wretchedness if there is anything to be learned or gained from it, but it remains dubiously justifiable if there is nothing but wretchedness in the picture, misery for its own sake. M. Mirbeau's account of the art of Lirat, a painter, who figures largely in the story, applies fairly to his own practice:

"He fashioned the man of to-day in his craving for enjoyment, a frightfully tortured soul with a body sapped by neurosis, with flesh tormented by lust, which quivers under the influence of passion that lures man on and sinks its claws into his skin. . . . Love besmirched with blood, drunk with the filth of vice, wretched love which fastens upon man and its mouth like a cupping glass and drains his veins, sucks the marrow of his bones and emaciates his frame. And in order to give these representations a still greater intensity of horror . . . he cast them in the midst of peaceful, smiling surroundings of surpassing clearness."

There is undeniable power and accuracy of observation in the book and (in the original French) an aptness and luridly alive, picturesque quality in its description. But it is all thoroughly of the *decadence* of the last century.

THE PERSONAL TOUCH. By Emma Beatrice Brummer. Brentano's.

MRS. BRUMMER is entitled to pleased commendation in that she has managed to do something here that doesn't classify. Whatever else may be said of it her plot and her unfolding of it are not hackneyed. In fact, the movement is so far out of the usual that at first one wonders whither she is going and what she is trying to do. The usual landmarks are not there. You cannot place the story from any particular fragment of it—no *ex pede Herculem* diagnosis will do. For some time, as one reads, it is a little like taking a wild ride in a careening auto, with no confidence in the steadiness of the man at the wheel. You are traveling, but you don't know at all where you're going. But finally you are there—an exciting, bewildering ride. And the goal itself is a surprise.

The manner of it is somewhere between Stevenson's "New Arabian Nights" and "Alice in Wonderland"—not that it has any resemblance in style to either, but there is an underlying common factor. The conception is bizarre; at times as solemnly absurd as some of the Stevensonian fantasia, but it also has a basis in something realistic. And it is not without a touch of Alice-ness at the other extreme. The total effect is highly entertaining. It will hold any one's interest.

So far as it can be classified it is, in part, a sort of wholesale Raffles business. There is a mysterious society that calls itself the "Justifiables" who organize robbery and general redistribution of improperly gained wealth; a preying upon the wicked rich, but not solely from altruistic motives. It is an odd mixup, and oddly plausible. They organize upon the lines of "big business" and pretend to high finance themselves—and "get away with it," for a while. The machinery of the story is not so unconventional. It involves a down and out Count, the introduction of an emissary of the 'Justifiables" into high society, plots and counterplots for theft, &c., with a good deal of fairly successful incident.

But then comes a surprise, for the thesis of the story, if it has one, is that the wicked rich are not really so dreadfully wicked after all! If there is any "propaganda" in it the moral is that the well to do are not an undeserving class; it is a justification of success and wealth to those who may think that success must mean dishonesty and meanness. It leaves the one-time predatory hero happily in the employ of the wicked rich magnate, a reformed character! The story is something of a *tour de force*, but it holds up steadily and bears the strain to the end.

"Q." By Katherine Newlin Burt. Houghton, Mifflin Company.

IT is too bad that so clever and really well equipped a writer as the author of this should have felt it necessary to adhere so closely to the popular standards of conventional plot, even of motion picture plot. One wishes she had had the courage to break away from the familiar frame work. For example, when the lady in the case goes to a lonely road house and gets herself 'into the power of the villain," &c., our friend "Merton of the Movies" could have foretold, from the first, that the hero was going to break in and rescue her. Other less sophisticated readers, even without a preliminary course from a correspondence school in scenario writing, might guess as much.

But though the narrative is a standardized affair it is managed very well indeed. It is free from the worst faults of that form, and isn't at all cheap in its detail. Its style is agreeable, and the story has not a little sound and happy humor, and some skillful character drawing. It is another case of the sublimated cowboy; another young Lochinvar who comes out of the West, being in love with an effete Eastern girl. He is really an oil soaked Lochinvar, but the oil doesn't break out on him until the end, though his fortune is due to having "struck oil" before he went in quest of education and love. He poses as the poor adventurer.

There are two ladies present: Eloise, who is beautiful but not much else, and Mary, who is poor but good, &c. Of course, eventually the wanderer marries the right one, and verybody is scheduled to be happy ver after. It is a pleasant, well told story, with incidental fine qualities.

The Romance Of Rivers

RIVERS AND THEIR MYSTERIES. By A. Hyatt Verrill. Duffield & Co.

CONSIDERING the unconscious part rivers play in our lives, most of us know very little about them. Just how little that is all readers of this informative and satisfying volume of Mr. Verrill's will be reminded on almost every page. As travelers we are carried up and down them in great steamers; as pleasure seekers we disport on them in motorboats and canoes; we bathe in them, and we enjoy them as among the most beautiful spectacles spread before us by nature. They have their romances of discovery and history; they carry food to us and bear freight essential to our comfort and well being; they give us food, and, unhappily, they act as our sewers. They have furnished power to man from remote times, a development of their usefulnesses only now coming into something like their real resources in furnishing "white fuel."

Mr. Verrill reminds us of all these things in his book and then tells us many things about the romance of rivers in mythology and story; about famous river towns; as to how rivers are formed; about river life beneath the surface; how rivers serve man; describes some unusual rivers that run underground and those formed of ice; describes those artificial rivers we call canals, and summarizes descriptions of important and famous rivers all over the world, from the tiny Thames, with its tremendous history, to the great Amazon and the Mississippi. Out of his much traveled memories he adds two fascinating chapters describing a voyage down a northern river and another up a tropical stream, both generally characteristic of such experiences. The many excellent illustrations add much to the informative value of the work.

Zane Grey, author of "To the Last man" (Harper's), is in New York preparatory to setting out for a month's stay in "The Painted Desert" of Arizona to gather material for a new novel. This is the country from which come the famous sand paintings. Mr. Grey's study in his Altadena (Cal.) home has a ceiling entirely covered with sand pictures of animals and Indian designs.

PUTNAM BOOKS AND AUTHORS

Soon you will be hearing a great deal about

Margaret Rivers Larminie

She has written a first novel, which we published yesterday called

SEARCH

It is an uncommon book, to say the least—the story of an unhappy marriage and its disastrous entanglements. In England, where "Search" has been on sale for a month or two, the British reviewers have unbended to an amazing extent in their reception of the novel. It is quite an admission for the London Telegraph to say that Miss Larminie "has succeeded in giving not mere plausibility but the stamp of actuality to the men and women of a very promising first novel."

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The ultra conservative Outlook of London feels that "Search" has "brains and heart behind it,' and begins its review by emphasizing "the dignified and melodious style, the powers of concentration upon the central theme, most unusual in a first novel."

* * *

Is there any real reason why a "first" novel, as critics love to stress, should not be as good, if not better, than a second, or tenth? Isn't it possible that a talented writer can put into a first effort more of the red-hot fire of enthusiasm and inspiration than can be mustered the second time? We feel that both "Search" and "Chanting Wheels" are strikingly convincing answers to both questions.

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Robert Gordon Anderson

whose exquisite essays, "Leader of Men," "Not Taps But Reveille" and "The Little Chap," were so enthusiastically received by press and public, has written a novel,

THE ISLE OF SEVEN MOONS

Here is pure romance and adventure—a sizzling tale of uncharted seas and untrodend shores, of love, of thrills, of intrigue and of mystery. It gallops through incident after incident and leaves you with pleasantly haunting memories. **$1.90**

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F. F. V.

otherwise known as Frederic F. Van de Water, conductor o the Tribune's "Tower," is the lone honorary member of the New York State Troopers. All the romance of this splendid constabulary, what they do, the perils and the humor of their calling, are related by Mr. Van de Water in a fine, free and readable style in his book.

GREY RIDERS

Many illustrations from photographs. **$2.50**

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Philadelphia Leads

not the league, (though her teams do look better this year), but Philadelphia is the first city to list

Painted Windows

as the best selling non-fiction book. Of course, we expected it, but the book is still comparatively young. The famous author, who still styles himself "A Gentleman With a Duster," analyzes the present chaotic condition in the church, and through searching character studies of twelve notable clerygmen indicates the cause, and suggests the remedy. The Philadelphia Ledger says

Painted Windows

"is no laugh in the void, no flash in the dark, but a searching criticism of men and the church in an hour that calls for spiritual leadership and power."

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SPRING TONICS

Books, like plays, need not be heavy, tragic or sombre to succeed. We have some sprightly Spring successes, that continue their merry ways, selling well because they entertain, divert, amuse, and interest people who still enjoy a ray of sunshine, now and then. One is "Mendoza and a Little Lady," an entertaining romance of studio life in Paris, by William Caine. Another is "Greenaea Island," by Victor Bridges, in which a chap inherits an island and with it all fifty-seven varieties of trouble. You should read both. They are good Spring tonics.

G. P. P.